

Games: The Dominant Medium of the Future

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Panelists

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Driven by trends in silicon and software, computer gaming is the medium that will define the recreational and cultural experience of the twenty-first century in the way that motion pictures and their offspring television, defined the recreation of the twentieth. Or so we assert! This panel will debate the truth of the statement that gaming is the dominant medium of the future with believers, skeptics, and outside referees.

Glenn Entis

Position: While we will all have fun arguing over the meaning of “dominant”, it is harder to argue about the games industry’s explosive growth relative to any other form of entertainment. The average gamer in the U.S. is now 28 years old -- and the sweet spot continues to migrate upwards as people who grew up playing games take the habit into adulthood. Also promising is the recent arrival of games that appeal to women such as *The Sims* and *Harry Potter*. Best of all from a demographic standpoint is the industry’s attraction of younger gamers. Generation Y, the mid-point of which is about to turn 12, is 15 percent bigger than generation X and totally immersed in the game culture.

Bio: Glenn Entis, VP, Electronic Arts Worldwide Studios focuses on the question “how does EA share knowledge and connect the right people” across its studios worldwide, and also leads EA Canada’s Games group in their mission to create new character based games. Prior to that, Glenn was the first CEO of DreamWorks Interactive in Los Angeles (now EALA), where he worked closely with Steven Spielberg and Jeffrey Katzenberg to bring their vision into games. Glenn oversaw the development of more than 15 titles at DWI, including the award-winning *Medal Of Honor* series and last year’s critically acclaimed PC game, *Clive Barker’s Undying*.

Glenn was a co-founder of the Oscar winning studio Pacific Data Images and for his work there received a Technical Achievement Award in 1998 from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. He and his wife live in Vancouver with their two pre-teen daughters.

Patrick Gilmore

Position: The gaming industry’s worst enemy is the idea, held by some self-congratulatory geeks, that games will be the medium to define the cultural experience of the 21st century. How can games influence a culture when most of them only imitate the drama of motion pictures, the action of spectator sports, or the adrenaline of extreme recreation? Comparisons of the gross

annual revenue of the games industry to first run theatrical motion pictures are nothing more than spinning the numbers. The real evidence lies in the culture itself, which largely continues to dismiss games as antisocial, overly violent and nerdy. But, hey, if you believe that narrow demographic of dateless, young adult men to be the cultural pioneers of the coming century, relax, kick back on your self-awarded laurels, and get ready for a hundred years of disappointment.

Bio: After producing video and computer games for nearly 10 years, Patrick Gilmore left the interactive industry to direct a major animated motion picture. In the film industry, the phrase, “it looks like a video game” is used disparagingly, but Gilmore has held on to an idealistic view of the potential of games. It’s when he hears that games have already arrived as a dominant cultural influence that Gilmore really bristles. It will be decades before games offer the depth of experience to the breadth of audience offered by film.

J.C. Herz

Position: “Will games be the dominant medium of the 21st century” is one of those questions that’s fun to ask, and fight about in the attempt to answer, but doesn’t really lead anywhere useful. Putting media mano a mano is like putting comic book characters or superheroes mano a mano: Spiderman vs. the Silver Surfer! James Bond vs. Shaft! Games vs. Movies! When in fact, games and movies don’t really compete, any more than Shaft and James Bond compete. They do different things, in different places, at different times, often in tandem (i.e. *Star Wars*). I think the big question (and a much more difficult question) is how games and movies are fundamentally different, and what those distinct vocabularies and grammars do to the relationship between media, both in the marketplace and in popular culture.

Bio: J.C. Herz is the CEO of Joystick Nation Inc., a consultancy that applies the principles of complex systems to the design of products, services, and brands. Drawing from an understanding of ecology, online social dynamics, computer games, and information theory, Joystick Nation’s focus is human-human interaction design, and systems that leverage the intrinsic characteristics of networked communication. Clients include multinational corporations, high-tech start-ups, nonprofit organizations, and the military.

Prior to founding Joystick Nation, J.C. was the author of two books, *Surfing On the Internet: A Nethead’s Adventures Online* (Little Brown, 1994), a pop anthropology of life in cyberspace and *Joystick Nation: How Videogames Ate Our Quarters, Won Our Hearts, and Rewired Our Minds* (Little Brown 1997, between

editions in North America, British edition available at amazon.co.uk), a history of videogames, which traces the cultural and technological evolution of the first medium that was born digital, and how it shaped the minds of a generation weaned on Atari.

Continuing her investigation into the grammar and syntax of game design, J.C. wrote 100 essays about computer game design for the New York Times (her "Game Theory" column, which ran weekly through February 10, 2000, is archived on the Times' site, www.nytimes.com/library/tech/reference/indexgametheory.html). She has conducted workshops on game design and learning, and has spoken at technology, design, and business conferences including Technology Entertainment Design (TED) in Monterey, Game Developers' Conference, SIGGRAPH, E3, and the World Economic Forum. J.C. sits on the National Research Council's Committee on Creativity and Information Technology.

Alex Pham

Position: You're all delusional. Just because some guys in a basement have the technology doesn't mean the public wants it. The consumer wants a simple, focused experience. Until you can define that experience, you can neither design nor implement it, let alone sell it. And until you can sell it to a mass market, you can't "influence culture." Is a bunch of nerds playing Doom after hours really a "defining cultural moment" in the history of humankind? After billions of dollars spent developing gee-whiz technologies and hopelessly-confusing interaction models (Majestic as Trespasser redux?), we've learned that people pretty much like to click on pictures of buildings and people. Why even bother with virtual reality when the real thing is so much better? And why hassle with interactivity when passive viewing yields a more intimate experience? Football coach Bill Parcells once said, "I guess that's why they play the games," but he was talking about the real thing, not the John Madden simulation. Truth is stranger than cut-scene fiction, plus the sound effects are better.

Bio: Alex Pham has been a journalist for 15 years. Prior to coming to the Los Angeles Times in 2000, she worked for USA Today, The Washington Post, The Oregonian, and most recently The Boston Globe, where she wrote a weekly technology column. Alex currently covers the interactive entertainment and semiconductor industries for the Times. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree in International Relations from Johns Hopkins University and a Masters degree in public policy from the University of Texas at Austin.

Will Wright

Position: From a designer's point of view interactive media has (by far) the largest design space of any media type. The interactive design palette includes elements of theatre, books, movies, toys, art, architecture, psychology and many other fields. We've only begun to scratch the surface of this new landscape.

Bio: Will Wright is the creator of both the *SimCity* and *The Sims* franchise. *SimCity* was released in 1989, and within a few months became a hit. The latest incarnation and definitive version of *SimCity*, *SimCity 3000 Unlimited*, has also continued in the tradition. Wright's game *The Sims*, puts players in charge of the lives of a neighborhood of simulated people. Released in February

of 2000, this title has become a cultural phenomenon and sold over 6 million copies worldwide and has become the best selling PC game of all time. *The Sims* has inspired four expansion packs; *Live'n' Large*, *House Party*, *Hot Date* and due out this March, *Vacation*. Combined sales for *The Sims*' franchise are approaching total 12 million units life-to-date. Next up for Wright is *The Sims Online*™. Scheduled for release in the second half of 2002, *The Sims Online* will enable you to take your Sims to an online world where you get to be yourself or whoever you want to be.

Ken Perlin - Moderator

Bio: Ken Perlin is a Professor in the Department of Computer Science and the director of the Media Research Laboratory at the Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences of New York University. He is also the director of the NYU Center of Advanced Technology, sponsored by the New York State Science and Technology Foundation. He completed his Ph.D. in 1986 from the New York University Department of Computer Science. His dissertation received the Janet Fabri award for outstanding Doctoral Dissertation. He received his B.A. in theoretical mathematics at Harvard University in 1979. His research interests include graphics, animation, and multimedia. In 1991 he was a recipient of a Presidential Young Investigator Award from the National Science Foundation. In 1997 he was a recipient of a Technical Achievement Award from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for his noise and turbulence procedural texturing techniques, which are widely used in feature films and television.

Dr. Perlin was Head of Software Development at R/GREENBERG Associates in New York, NY from 1984 through 1987. Prior to that, from 1979 to 1984, he was the System Architect for computer generated animation at Mathematical Applications Group, Inc., Elmsford, NY. TRON was the first movie for which his name got onto the credits. He has served on the Board of Directors of the New York chapter of ACM/SIGGRAPH, has been a member of ACM and ACM SIGGRAPH, and is currently a member of the board of Directors of the New York Software Industry Association.

Bob Nicoll – Organizer

Bio: Bob Nicoll is a graphics trainer at Electronic Arts, and worldwide graphics manager of EA University. He has been both a CG production artist and trainer for the past twenty-five years. His experience spans university professorships, 3D CG artist, Art Director, Designer, Producer, Technical Support Specialist, and, most importantly, a teacher at Electronic Arts. His current focus encompasses technical and aesthetic design skills, from cg animation techniques to life drawing and improvisation classes.